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Another CIA plot: Cuba crops

United Press International

LOS ANGELES — The United States used cloud seeding to dry up the Cuban sugar crop in 1969 and 1970, Lowell Ponte, a former Pentagon think tank researcher, said yesterday.

It was part of a secret Pentagon project aimed at using nature weapons to destabilize weather in the Soviet Union, China and other Communist countries, and to enhance the power of U.S. food sales, he said.

Ponte, a former specialist for the International Research and Technology Corp., said the CIA and the Pentagon seeded clouds in wind currents that carry rains to Cuba:

"Between 1966 and 1972 the CIA and later the Pentagon were using cloud-seeding to make enemy trails muddy in Southeast Asia," Ponte said in an interview for National Public Radio.

"But the seeding near Cuba was to cause less rain, not more. It was supposed to squeeze rain out of clouds before they reached the island. You might say we tried to embargo rainclouds."

The experimental seeding was stepped up in 1970, Ponte said, after Cuban Premier Fidel Castro staked the honor of his Communist government on the success of that year's sugar crop.

"Castro set a harvest goal of 10 million tons of sugar," Ponte said. "The CIA decided, after Castro's promises, that failure would demoralize his people and make Cuban Communism appear a failure."

The cloud seeding brought erratic weather in Cuba and the sugar harvest fell short of its goal. Castro offered to resign, but remained in office, Ponte said.

"Weather science is too primitive to say that cloud seeding hurt Cuba's harvest," Ponte said. "But it could have. The point is our government secretly attempted to tamper with the weather in another nation, with which we were not at war, in an effort to cause economic and political harm."

Ponte, author of "The Cooling," a book dealing with climatic change and manipulation of weather for political reasons, said the cloud seeding near Cuba was originally to provide information for a Pentagon project called "Nile Blue."

The secret project, he said, has studied ways to melt polar icecaps, direct hurricanes and tornadoes as weapons and to "destabilize weather in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba" to ruin harvests.

The Pentagon and CIA study was aimed at increasing America's "food weapon" — the political use of food sales — in much the same way the Arab nations use oil, he said.

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Cloud-Seeding Charge Denied

Washington

The Defense Department denied yesterday charges that the United States tried to change the weather over Cuba in order to damage that nation's sugar crop.

"It's not true," a Pentagon spokesman said of the charge that the Unites States, in 1969 and 1970, attemped to alter Cuba's weather. The claim was made Saturday by former Defense Department consultant Lowell Ponte.

Ponte formerly was an environmental researcher with the International Research and Technology Corp. of Washington, D.C.

He said the CIA and the Pentagon cooperated in a program to seed clouds near Cuba so they would drop their rain before reaching the island, thus causing a damaging drought.

"We have never conducted weather modification around Cuba," the Pentagon spokesman said.

He added that there has only been one classified weather modification program in the past. That one was over the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam, he said, and was made public in 1974.

The spokesman said the only current weather-change program being conducted by the Pentagon involves fog dispersal at airports.

The CIA could not be reached for comment.

Ponte said the CIA embarked on a major cloud seeding program over Cuba after Cuban Premier Fidel Castro staked his honor in 1970 on producing a record ten million metric ton harvest of sugar cane.

He said that the 1970 Cuban sugar harvest fell two million metric tons short of Castro's goal. But Ponte added that there is "no way to say definitely" the CIA's cloud seeding caused the harvest shortfall.

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